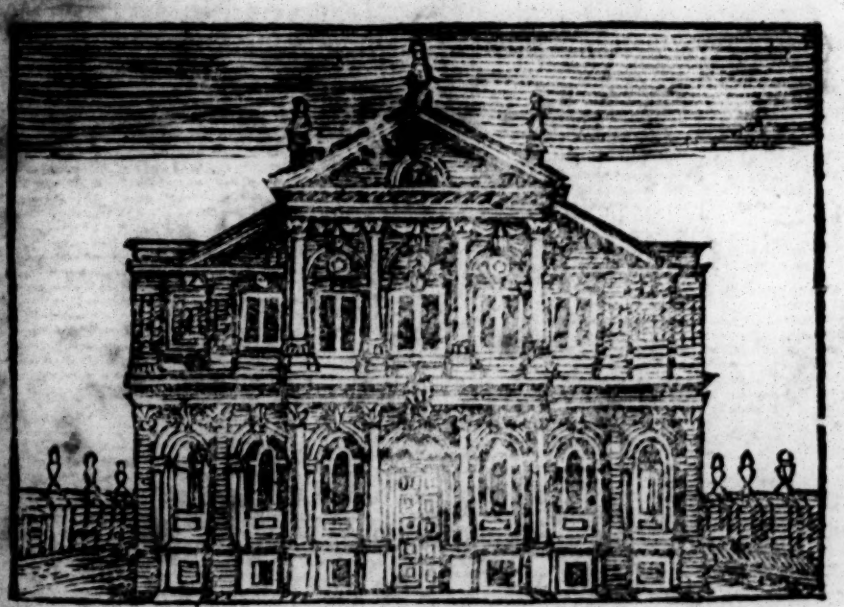
Eng. Hist. Topogra. vol II

A DESCRIPTION OF THE PAINTING IN THE THEATRE.



OXFORD,

Printed for JOHN BIGNELL. 1780.

A DESCRIPTION, &c.

THIS THEATRE, in Form almoſt of a *Roman* D, only longer in Proportion from Right to Left, on the Outſide is adorned with Sculpture; particularly the Statue of *Charles* II. the old Duke of *Ormond*, and Arch-biſhop *Sheldon*; done by *Chair*. Within with Painting, *viz.* the Portraits, at full Length, of the Founder Arch-biſhop *Sheldon*, the ſame Duke of *Ormond*, and Sir *Chriſtopher Wren* the Architect: Likewiſe a curious Cieling; (done by *Straiter*) of which the following is a Deſcription.

In Imitation of the Theatres of the antient *Greeks* and *Romans*, which were too large to be covered with Lead or Tile, ſo this, by the Painting of the flat Roof within is repreſented open; and as they ſtretched a Cordage from Pilaſter to Pilaſter, upon which they ſtrained a Covering of Cloth, to protect the People from the Injuries of the Weather, ſo here is a Cord-moulding gilded, and reaches croſs the Room, both in Length and Breadth, which ſupporteth a great reddiſh Drapery, ſuppoſed to have covered the Roof, but now furled up by the *Genii* round about the Room, towards the Wall, which diſcovereth the open Air, and maketh Way for the Deſcent of the *Arts* and *Sciences*, that are congregated in a Circle of Clouds, to whoſe Aſ-

ſembly

ſembly *Truth* deſcends, as being ſollicited and implored by them all.

For Joy of this Feſtival ſome other *Genii* ſport about the Clouds, with their Feſtoons of Flowers of Laurels, and prepare their Garlands of Laurels and Roſes, *viz. Honour* and *Pleaſure*, for the great Lovers and Students of thoſe Arts: And that this Aſſembly might be perfectly happy, their great Enemies and Diſturbers, *Envy*, *Rapine*, and *Brutality*, are by the *Genii* of their oppoſite Virtues, *viz. Prudence*, *Fortitude*, and *Eloquence*, driven from the Society, and thrown down Head-long from the Clouds: The Report of the Aſſembly of the one, and the Expulſion of the other, being proclaimed through the open and ſerene Air, by ſome other of the *Genii*, who blowing their antick Trumpets, divide themſelves into the ſeveral Quarters of the World.

Hitherto in Groſs.

More particularly the Circle of Figures conſiſt, Firſt of *Theology*, with her Book of Seven Seals, imploring the Aſſiſtance of *Truth* for the unfolding of it.

On her Left-hand is the *Moſaical Law* veiled, with the Tables of Stone, to which ſhe points with her Iron Rod.

On her Right-hand is the *Goſpel*, with the Croſs in one Hand, and a Chalice in the other.

In

In the ſame Diviſion, over the *Moſaical Law*, is *Hiſtory*, holding up her Pen, as dedicating it to *Truth*, and an attending *Genius*, with ſeveral Fragments of Old Writings, from which ſhe collects her Hiſtory into her Book.

On the other Side, near the *Goſpel*, is *Divine Poeſy*, with her Harp of *David*'s Faſhion.

In the Triangle on the Right Hand of the *Goſpel*, is alſo *Logick*, in a Poſture of arguing; and on the Left-hand of the *Moſaical Law*, is *Muſick*, with her Antick Lyre, having a Pen in her Hand, and a Paper of Muſick Notes on her Knee, with a *Genius* on her Right-hand, (a little within the Partition of *Theology*) playing on a Flute, being the Emblem of antient Muſick.

On the Left, but within the Partition for *Phyſick*) *Dramatick Poeſy*, with a Vizard, repreſenting *Comedy*, a bloody Dagger for *Tragedy*, and the Reed Pipe for *Paſtoral*.

In the Square on the Right Side of the Circle, is *Law*, with her Ruling Scepter, accompanied with Records, Patents, and Evidences on the one Side, and on the other with *Rhetorick*; By theſe is an attending *Genius*, with the Scales of *Juſtice*, and a Figure with a Palm-branch, the Emblem of Reward for virtuous Actions; and the *Roman Faſces*, the Marks of Power and Puniſhment.

Printing, with a Caſe of Letters in one Hand, and a Form ready ſet in the other, and by her ſeveral Sheets hanging as drying.

On

On the left ſide oppoſite to *Law* is *Phyſick*, holding the knotty Staff of *Æſculapius* with a Serpent winding about it: the *Botaniſt* imploring the Aſſiſtance of *Truth*, in the right underſtanding of the Nature of her Plants: *Chymiſtry* with a Retort in her Hands; And *Chirurgery* preparing herſelf to finiſh the Diſſecting of a Head, which hath the Brain already opened, and held before her by one of the *Genii*.

On the Left Side the Circle, oppoſite to *Theology*, in three Squares, are the *Mathematical Sciences*, (depending on *Demonſtration*,) as the other on *Faith*, in the firſt of which is *Aſtronomy* with the Celeſtial Globe, *Geography* with the Terreſtrial, together with three attending *Genii*; having *Arithmetick* in the Square on one Hand, with a Paper of Figures; *Optics* with the Perſpective Glaſs; *Geometry* with a Pair of Compaſſes in her Left; and a Table with *Geometrical* Figures in it, in her Right-Hand: and in the Square on the other Hand, *Architecture* embracing the Capital of a Column, with Compaſſes, and the Norma or Square lying by her, and a Workman holding another Square in one Hand, and a Plumb Line in the other.

In the midſt of theſe Squares and Triangles (as deſcending from above) is the Figure of *Truth* ſitting as on a Cloud, in one Hand holding a Palm Branch (the Emblem of Victory) in the other the Sun, whoſe Brightneſs enlightens the whole Circle of Figures, and is ſo bright, that

that it ſeems to hide the Face of herſelf, to the Spectators below.

Over the Entrance of the Front of the THEATRE, are Three Figures tumbling down; Firſt *Envy*, with her Snaky Hairs, Squint Eyes, Nag's Breaſt, pale venomous Complection, ſtrong but ugly Limbs, and riveled Skin, frighted from above by the Sight of the Shield of *Pallas*, with the *Gorgon*'s Head in it, againſt which ſhe oppoſes her ſnaky Treſſes, but her fall is ſo precipitous, that ſhe has no command of her Arms.

Then *Rapine*, with her fiery Eyes, grinning Teeth, ſharp Twangs, her Hands imbruded in Blood, holding a bloody Dagger in one Hand, in the other a burning Flambeau; with theſe Inſtruments threatening the Deſtruction of Learning, and all its Habitations, but ſhe is overcome, and prevented, by a *Herculean Genius*, or Power.

Next that is repreſented brutiſh, ſcoffing *Ignorance*, endeavouring to vilify and condemn what ſhe underſtands not, which is charmed by a *Mercurial Genius* with his *Caduceus*.

In this Theatre are held the Public Acts, called the *Comitia* or *Encœnia:* At which ſolemn Times there are ſeveral extraordinary Proctors appointed, who are to take Care that public Peace is obſerved, and that all Perſons are placed according to their Degrees.

When properly filled, the Vice-Chancellor being ſeated in the Center of the ſemicircular, Part the Doctors on his Right and Left Hand, the Proctors and Curators in their Robes, the Maſters

Maſters of Arts, Bachelors, and Under-Graduates, in their reſpective Habits and Places, together with Strangers of both Sexes, it makes the moſt auguſt Appearance of any Room whatever.

The flat Roof is compoſed of ſhort Pieces of Timber, continued to a great Breadth, without Arch-work or Pillar to ſupport them, being ſuſtained only by the Side-Walls and their own Texture, though from Side-Wall to Side-Wall it is 80 Feet over one Way, and 70 the other; which gave Occaſion to ſay, that the Foundation was on the Roof.

This Edifice, which juſtly deſerves to be deemed one of our principal Curioſities, was built by that celebrated Architect Sir *Chriſtopher Wren*, at the Expence of Arch-biſhop *Sheldon*, the Chancellor, A. D. 1669, and coſt his Grace no leſs than 15000*l.* beſides which he left 2000*l.* to purchaſe Lands for the perpetual Repair of it.

F I N I S.